DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 213 003 CS 006 527

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TITLE College Students' Self-Perceptions on Factors Which Have Influenced Their Reading Ability.
PUB DATE 81
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (26th, New Orleans, LA, April 27-May 1, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attitude Measures; College Students; Evaluation Methods; Higher Education; *Influences; *Reading Ability; Reading Attitudes; *Reading Research; *Self Evaluation (Individuals); *Test Construction

ABSTRACT

A pilot study was designed to develop an instrument to examine students' self-perceptions regarding their own reading. An open survey was conducted in which 300 college students in a compensatory reading program listed those factors which might influence a person's reading ability. In all, 163 responses were listed, and these were reduced to 10 general categories. Next, 200 of the students ranked the 10 categories according to their feelings about their own reading. It was hypothesized that the most encouraging findings would be the significant emergence of the variables over which students had some control, such as attitude, effort, material, distractions, and friends. Analyses of the data produced mixed results, however. Attitude, effort, schools, materials, and teachers ranked statistically higher than the factors of intelligence, family, distractions, friends, and physical problems. Although the internal factors of attitude and effort were the highest ranked, they were not significantly different from the external factors of schools, materials, and teachers. On the other hand, the clustering of the noncontrol variables in the top ranks, which would have suggested that the students felt they had little or no control over the factors that influenced their reading ability, did not occur. (RL)

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College Students' Self-Perceptions on Factors Which Have Influenced Their Reading Ability

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Reading competence is crucial for a college education. However, many students entering college lack sufficient ability to cope with college material. Much effort and considerable resources have been devoted to this problem. Despite this work, there have been no studies reported in the literature beyond those of an anecdotal or case-study nature which examine college students' self-perception on factors which have influenced their reading ability. Consequently, instructors and advisors have little substantive information upon which to make instructional decisions and counseling suggestions as they relate to the affective domain of their students.

Background

In the field of education, more attention has been focused recently on the affective domain in addition to the usual concentration on the cognitive. Within the discipline of reading, there has been movement beyond the usual concerns with 1) text and 2) reader, to the psycho-social context in which reading is engaged. In other words, according to some researchers, it may be as important to know what the reader feels about themselves and their reading as they relate to the reading situation as it is to know how their measured deficiencies can be remedied. If students feel that efforts to improve their reading are out of their control or a matter of chance or circumstance, then productive reme-

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diation is less likely.

Because of this concern, the investigators became interested in locating an instrument to ascertain student self-perceptions on factors influencing their reading ability. A thorough review of the literature and an ERIC search were conducted which yielded no such instrument nor a statistical study on this specific topic. Many related reports were reviewed which dealt with such concerns as student self-concept and academic achievement, attribution theory, teacher perceived factors influencing student ability, and single factor studies correlated with reading achievement. Very few studies were reported where the factors were generated by the students. In these instances, the studies were for the most part descriptive studies of what students wrote or said about their ability. Because students reported on themselves, in their own words, it was difficult for the authors of these studies to index their subjects' thoughts. Consequently, rankings of the factors (student perceptions) were not presented.

Pilot Study Design

Because no instrument or information were found, a pilot study was designed to both develop an instrument and study the issue of students' self-perceptions regarding their own reading.

An open survey was conducted in which 300 students enrolled in a compensatory reading program were asked the following question: "List as many factors as you can which may influence a person's reading ability. There are no right or wrong answers. Every idea that you list will be helpful." Thus, at the initial stage of the

pilot study,we didn't ask students to personalize their answers. We asked for those factors which could influence any person's reading ability. To encourage beyond the briefest of answers, the paper was numbered from 1 to 10 with directions given both on the sheet and verbally that students were free to give fewer or more responses.

Responses from all of the student papers were categorized first for sameness of idea and then later for a more general category. For example, if a student entered "family problems" as one of the factors affecting reading ability then this would be counted with similar responses such as "family difficulty." A response such as, "had to go to work early to help out at home" although certainly related to the idea of family problems was listed separately. In all, 163 separate ideas were listed. In order to collapse this data for the second phase of the study, broader categories were established which incorporated all but a very few of the specific ideas listed; that is, we looked for ways to generalize responses.

The student responses were divided into two broad sub-headings: External and Internal. External referred to things over which the student had little or no control such as the make-up of their family or the schools they attended. Internal referred to things over which students could exert some control such as their attitude and study habits.

External variables	Internal variables
1. School location	1. Social affective
2. Physical environment	2. Affective

3.	Social environment	3.	Study habits
4.	Personal limitations	4.	Effort, Attitude

Based upon the responses received, a count was made of the most frequently mentioned items. Those items which were cited by at least three people were included as part of a general category. After studying and coding all the data, we found we could reduce all the responses to 10 categories. These then became our 10 factors. The following is the list of 10 factors most mentioned by the students, either positively or negatively:

Schools, Teachers, Family, Material, Attitude, Effort, Intelligence, Friends, Distractions, Physical problems.

For our next phase, we asked students to rank these 10 factors in order of importance. This aspect of the study differed from the first phase in that now we wanted students' personal reactions. The rankings were to be done according to their feelings about their own reading. Rather than listing the 10 factors on a single sheet of paper, the 10 factors were listed on index cards, one factor per card with a brief explanation.* For example, one card with the family factor appeared like this:

"FAMILY"
your family background (family support, conditions at home) and the influence your family has had on your reading ability.

*The list of ten factors and their explanations is attached.

The ten index cards were compiled in deck form. A sufficent number of decks were prepared so that students could work with their own set. Each deck of cards containing the 10 factors and brief explanations was shuffled so that the order of the items was randomized. We chose this method of rank ordering to avoid having students arbitrarily pick the first item on a list. Because each deck had the factors arranged in random order, a "response set" was minimized. We also wanted students to actively manipulate the data, physically arrange the factors, and make any adjustments, if necessary.

The students were instructed to arrange the cards in the order in which they felt the factors to be important and then to list this ranking on an answer sheet. To familiarize them with the process, a similar task was undertaken prior to the study whereby students were asked to rank five factors that people looked for in a job. The job factors were also listed on cards and prefaced by a verbal explanation.

Data Collection

In all, 204 students completed this task. Four answer sheets were eliminated because of irregularities in the rankings Using the remaining answer sheets, a table of frequencies and cumulative frequencies for each factor was produced. For each factor, an average rank was computed.

Data Analysis

In order to test for significant differences among the factors, the data were first transformed to an appropriate scale. The normalized rank approach as described in Guilford (1950) was utilized. The Newman-Keuls method of multiple comparisions was used to test the significance of differences in the mean ranks. Because of the exploratory nature of this inquiry, the .01 level of significance was used.

Findings

Table 1 shows the mean ranks of each of the ten factors and their corresponding normalized values arranged in rank order (from most important to least important.)

Table I

Mean Rank and Normalized Rank Assigned to Each of Ten Factors

N = 200

Factor	Mean Rank	Normalized Rank
Attitude	3.770	5.980
Effort	4.145	5.780
Schools	4.515	5.565
Material	4.535	5.545
Teachers	4.671	5.485
Intellignece	5.360	5.100
Family	5.520	5.060
Distractions	7.062	4.115
Friends	7.165	3.820
Physical Problems	7.835	3.550

Attitude, effort, schools, materials and teachers ranked statistically higher than factors intelligence, family, distractions, friends and physical problems.

Schools, materials, teachers, intelligence and family each ranked significantly higher than physical problems, friends and distractions.

Implications and Limitations

It was hypothesized that the most encouraging findings would be the significant emergence of the variables over which students had some control such as attitude, effort, material, distractions and friends. Although attitude and effort were the highest ranked, they were not significantly different than schools, materials and teachers. On the other hand, the clustering of the non-control variables in the top ranks might signal that students felt they had little or no control over the factors that influenced their reading ability and this did not occur. Because data were collected at one institution, over a one term period, on basically non-traditional students, the researchers intend to verify the findings on a larger more standard population before generalizing.

FACTORS FOR STUDY

INTELLIGENCE

How smart you are and the influence your intelligence has on your reading.

PHYSICAL PROBLEMS

The kind of problems you have such as poor vision, hearing loss or a learning disability and their affect on your reading ability.

FAMILY

Your family background (family support, conditions at home) and the influence your family has had on your reading ability

TEACHERS

The kind of teachers you have had (whether they were good or bad) and their influence on your reading ability

MATERIAL

The kind of material you have read (whether it's boring or interesting, easy or difficult) and the influence the reading material has had on your reading ability

EFFORT

The amount of time and effort that you put into reading

DISTRACTIONS

The amount of time you are kept from reading by such things as television, radio, and partying

ATTITUDE

Your attitude (feelings) toward reading

FRIENDS

The kind of friends you have and your friends' influence on your reading ability

SCHOOLS

The kind of schools you have attended and the influence your schools had on your reading ability